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Defense Intelligence Agency
Appraisal

North Korea: Redeployment Implications (U)

Summary

(S) North Korea is continuing to redeploy and reorganize major elements of its ground forces, adding significantly to its Forward Area combat strength. Approximately 150 new military installations — generally of battalion size — are under construction in the 4 forward corps, and new units have arrived at some 40 existing installations in the same area. Although the exact identification, organizational structure, and mission of many of the newly redeployed units are undetermined, available information indicates an artillery corps with at least four subordinate brigades, three armor heavy combined-arms brigades, at least two mechanized infantry brigades, and an infantry division have been or are being formed in the Forward Area since January. These units are in addition to the two mechanized corps headquarters and eight mechanized infantry brigades created in the Forward Area since 1980 [redacted] and the tripling of the forward corps engineer river-crossing (ERC) assets. A comparison of this new disposition to the

[redacted] the first and second echelons as well as the strategic reserve are being garrisoned far enough forward that extensive pre H-Hour troop movements will no longer be required. All units, however, may not be in place and in full combat readiness for another 15 months.

Discussion

(S) To fully understand the impact of these deployments on indications and warning (I&W), the significant role that forward movement of ground forces just before an invasion has played in the I&W strategy for Korea must be understood. Unambiguous warning was not believed possible [redacted] Based on this, it was previously estimated warning could be given up to 48 hours before an attack. Virtually every study on warning of war in Korea since 1977 identified events associated with this movement as the most telling of all the indicators that might be detected.

[redacted] would attempt a surprise attack within 10 days of Kim Il-song's decision to go to war. Pre H-Hour repositioning of forces in this case then was minimized as much as possible, but was still extensive in order to maximize force advantage beyond the normal peacetime disposition of forces. Based on this, I&W interest focused on the units and locations expected to be involved in the pre H-Hour redeployments.

[redacted] Pre H-Hour movement required extensive repositioning of the five "shock" brigades, moving three infantry divisions from Fourth Corps to Second

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are no longer assessed as first echelon units eliminating their need to move before H-Hour. In summary, the first echelon is no longer a source of lucrative I&W information. North Korea's new force disposition requires only limited pre H-Hour movement by the first echelon, minimizing detection opportunities and providing, at most, short-term tactical warning of less than 24 hours.

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viding the potential for warning. Additionally, two corps headquarters with support units were required to move forward for increased command and control, in the process creating further opportunities for advanced warning.

(S) Today, the second echelon is stronger and better suited for its exploitation mission than the force envisioned in the 1981 study. More disturbingly for I&W, it is already forward deployed. As a result of the formation of mechanized corps and the 1984 redeployments,

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units well suited in

terms of size, organization, and mobility for an exploitation mission in the constricted terrain of Korea. Additionally, the second echelon will probably also include the Koksan Armored Division, which may have been reorganized into smaller brigade-size elements, the 106th Armored Brigade, and up to three powerful new armor heavy, combined-arms brigades being established in Fourth Corps at this time. The forward deployment of this force totaling approximately 15 division or brigade-size units provides little opportunity for more than a few hours' warning.

(U) North Korean Mechanized Corps.

Corps, and repositioning strategic artillery and ERC units into the Forward Area. Based on this, considerable I&W significance was given to redeployment of the "shock" brigades garrisoned some

and several major rear corps artillery units.

(S) At present, the three corps fronting the DMZ will probably constitute the first attack echelon. They now control at least 17 division- or brigade-size units — 13 infantry divisions, a mechanized infantry brigade, and 3 armored brigades. Support of these maneuver units is available from the already forward-deployed artillery corps and three forward corps ERC units of at least regimental size. Although the present first echelon is smaller than the 1981 postulated force, the new artillery corps and the expanded forward corps ERC inventories will greatly reduce the need for additional pre H-Hour redeployments from the rear. Reinforcement by two or three infantry divisions from Fourth Corps might take place just be-

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(U) Units Redeployed to or within the forward area in 1984.

(S) The rear area has other offensive forces that do not appear to be allocated, at this time, to either the first or second echelon. Referred to in the 1981 and other studies as the "strategic reserve" or "third echelon" — the last offensive forces committed, they would logically be available for reinforcement anywhere along the front and, like the second echelon, would have a primary mission of exploitation. Whether the concept of a third echelon actually exists in North Korean doctrine is not known; however, the term strategic reserve is used in this appraisal to describe the manner in which the North might position and commit these forces for the offense.

Smaller than either the first or second echelon and generally lacking in mobility, it would have been forward deployed into the Koksan Valley of northern Second Corps just before H-Hour, providing limited opportunities for warning.

(S) At the present time, two mobile corps-level organizations garrisoned in the rear area — the Northwest Mechanized Corps and the

unit [redacted] appear well suited for a strategic reserve mission. Both have been heavily involved in redeployment activity this year.

[redacted] reducing their distance from the DMZ by one-third to one-half. Concurrent changes in the Northwest Mechanized Corps and the 105th Armored Division are less clear, although some reorganization has taken place and some subordinate units have probably been redeployed to the Forward Area as part of the continuing buildup of the first and second echelon. The exact strength and organization of those elements remaining in the rear area has not yet been determined.

(S) A major question arising from the current repositioning of the strategic reserve is whether the force will be further repositioned

The answer seems to be no. Such a move is made far less necessary than was the case in 1981 by the creation of a strong, forward-deployed second echelon that now includes units formerly associated with the strategic reserve. Additionally, the offensive units currently in the rear area are far more mobile than

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those envisioned in the 1981 study, greatly increasing their ability to move to the battle area in a timely fashion. Finally, [redacted]

[redacted] and Northwest Mechanized Corps if it did not consider the new garrisons suitable for the initial wartime disposition of these forces. Although a further buildup in the Koksan Valley just before an attack cannot be ruled out, it can not be depended on to provide warning of an impending attack.

Outlook

(S) Some potential for warning, based on ground force movement, remains. Units will still have to take up attack positions and, in some cases, concentrate along the attack avenues. Any pre H-Hour reinforcement of the first echelon will probably come from the infantry divisions of Fourth Corps. [redacted]

[redacted] and therefore are the most likely to require pre H-Hour preparation and movement. Elements of the new artillery corps are beyond gun range from the DMZ and will have to move up before H-Hour, requiring at least several hours of preparation and travel. Although less likely than in the past, the strategic reserve's Northwest Mechanized Corps and the corps level unit originally at [redacted]

[redacted] has been reduced to no more than 24 hours. Because of this, the [redacted]

(S) Maintaining the emphasis on detecting pre H-Hour movement by conventional ground force units no longer seems prudent. Other elements of the North Korean political-economic-military structure, such as political posture, changes in ground force readiness levels, war preparations in the economic sector, and activities of reserve forces, need to be closely monitored and further exploited for potential longer term warning.

(S) Although the structure that is emerging from this latest reorganization of North Korea's ground force is becoming clearer, the point at which it will be complete and fully combat ready remains questionable. Cold weather will probably bring a slowdown in activity, but a new round of redeployments could be initiated next spring. The buildup of one or two additional infantry divisions along the [redacted]

[redacted] seem the most likely possibilities if further redeployments do occur. Full exercising of the new structure, including the new divisions in the reserve component, will be required to reach and maintain combat readiness. The 1985-86 winter training cycle will probably be required to bring new units to their full combat effectiveness. While the near-term threat to South Korea has certainly not been diminished, the full potential of the improvement to [redacted]

This new ground force structure may not be completely in place and proven combat ready to the satisfaction of the [redacted]

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